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SUBJECT: KUWAITIS OUTRAGED BY ISRAELI ATTACKS ON GAZA

Classified By: Political Counselor Pete O'Donohue for reasons  
1.4 b and d

¶1. (U) Summary: The GOK and Members of Parliament strongly denounced Israel's December 27 air raids on Gaza. Statements typically use strong language, including terms like "genocide" and "massacre". A number of MPs have called for a rally on the evening of December 28 to provide Kuwaitis with an opportunity to vent their outrage; a senior Hamas member will reportedly address the rally via a recorded message. The Foreign Minister has indicated that Kuwaiti hospitals may admit some injured Palestinians and a Kuwaiti NGO has dispatched supplies to hospitals in Gaza. Kuwaiti commentators generally lament a perceived tepid Arab response to the Israeli strikes, and few appear optimistic that a more unified or forceful response will emerge from the impending GCC summit in Oman. Embassy does not perceive a heightened security threat at this time. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Kuwaitis across the political spectrum reacted with shock and outrage to Israel's December 27 attacks on Hamas targets in Gaza. Significant high-level responses included:

-- MFA's official website cited an unnamed "official source" as stating that the GOK "strongly condemns and deplores the serious escalation by Israel and urges the international community to shoulder its responsibilities by immediately moving to adopt the necessary measures to deter Israel."

-- Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Al-Sabah commented to reporters that the December 29-30 GCC summit (which he will attend) would be held at a time the Palestinians were being exposed to Israeli "massacres." "We are heading to the GCC summit with voices of cannons and rockets, and blood is shed in Gaza," he noted. He suggested that the Israeli attacks were not surprising from a "regime and government which stole the Arab right, the Palestinian territories and the rights of the Palestinian people." The FM called on the Palestinians to unite to face "this huge crisis...it is a time to reunite not to partition." The FM also stated that Kuwaiti hospitals would be prepared to treat Palestinians injured by "Israeli aggression". Shaykh Dr. Mohammed also appealed to the international community to press Israel for a prompt cessation of its "barbaric acts and genocide."

-- National Assembly (Parliament) Speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi stated that the attacks represent "genocide against unarmed and besieged people" and were "a violation of international laws and UN resolutions and a breach of all human values," particularly in view of the timing of the attacks during a religious season. Khorafi also criticized what he characterized as a "weak and paralyzed" response by Arab governments to the Israeli attacks, calling for a firmer response by the Arab community. None of the GOK comments offered a proactive solution for resolving the crisis.

¶3. (U) The reaction of numerous Members of Parliament was

equally vehement, with Mohammed Al-Sager, the Chairman of parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee denouncing the Israeli air raids as "barbaric aggression and a war crime." Al-Sager called on international and Arab organizations to take steps to deter Israel from further attacks and to provide assistance to the affected Palestinians. Islamist MPs from both the Sunni and Shia communities also condemned the "massacres" and called on Kuwaitis to express their outrage at a rally to be held in front of the National Assembly building during the evening of December 28. (Note: Rally organizers say that Khaled Mesh'al, the Damascus-based head of the Hamas Political Bureau will address the rally via a recorded message. End Note.) At least one prominent Islamist, MP Dr. Walid Al-Tabtabaei, said the USG shares responsibility for allowing the aggression with Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority. Tabtabaei and Islamist MP colleague Dr. Faisal Al-Mislim demanded that the GOK bar Abbas from attending the Kuwait-hosted Arab Economic Summit in January. (Note: The FM's comment concerning the need for Palestinians to unite rather than suffer disunity reportedly came in response to this suggestion." End Note.) An MP representing the Islamic Constitutional Movement (Kuwait's version of the Muslim Brotherhood), Dr. Jamaan Al-Hirbish, called on his fellow MPs to adopt a law criminalizing communication with "the Zionist entity."

14. (U) Kuwait's media universally condemned the Israeli attacks, with many displaying gruesome full-color photographs of dead and injured Palestinians, including women and children, on page one. While many of the newspapers carried online wire service stories that noted the U.S. appeal to all sides to avoid civilian casualties, the stories also

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emphasized the USG's condemnation of Hamas for breaking the cease-fire. Kuwaiti-origin reportage on the incidents was decidedly less balanced, with headlines that referred to the attacks variously as "carnage," "massacre," "slaughter," "a disgrace," and "the pigs burned Gaza." Editorial coverage ranged from appeals for an Arab summit to promote peace to lamentations over Arab incapacity to do anything meaningful to help the Palestinians; a front-page opinion piece in the English-language "Kuwait Times" condemned the Israelis for perpetrating a new Holocaust on the Palestinians.

15. (U) The director of a Kuwaiti NGO called the Kuwait Mercy Assembly, Dr. Walid Al-Anjari, told the Kuwaiti press on December 28 that his organization has dispatched two medical convoys to the Rafah crossing to assist Gaza residents. One of the convoys reportedly contains supplies for the Kuwait Hospital in Gaza, which, according to Al-Anjari, is treating many of the injured from the raids and the second convoy is destined for Al-Shifaa Hospital, reported to be the largest hospital in the area. Al-Anjari stated that Egyptian authorities have agreed to permit the convoys to pass through their territory.

16. (U) Embassy efforts to meet with MFA officials on December 28 to discuss the issue proved fruitless; interlocutors respond that the incidents have left them "too busy" to have meetings before December 30 (December 29 is a local holiday). We will follow up as appropriate on the 30th. One item for discussion will be GOK plans, per the FM's remarks, to provide hospital access to injured Palestinians. We understand that medical assistance was provided to a small number of Palestinians following the October 2000 Intifadah. Embassy's website has posted the Secretary's statement and that of the NSC spokesman.

17. (C) Embassy discussions with host country security and intelligence do not indicate the need for a heightened security posture at this time. Post will monitor developments closely. In particular, the holding of public rallies (a rarity in Kuwait) could quickly alter the security calculus.

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